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Groton Historical Society



THE REPORT OF THE HISTORIAN
FOR THE YEAR 1914. GROTON,
MASSACHUSETTS, JANUARY
FIFTH, 1915. PUBLISHED BY VOTE
OF THE SOCIETY



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THE matter of chief interest in town this year has been the question of building new schoolhouses. The town has always shown interest in its schools, and while for the most part we have been rather conservative, we have also made a creditable record as compared with other communities of the same population in the State.

On November 18, 1805, the town adopted a report, "By-Laws of Groton, Relative to Schools," which is the earliest public document of the town. It was printed in 1806 and contains thirteen articles as follows:

Article 1 decides the number of districts to be twelve. Full descriptions of the boundaries of these districts are given in the following twelve articles, which are published by Dr. Samuel A. Green, our President, in his Historical Series No. IX. Without going into detail they are roughly classified by me as follows:

No. 1. Village, from Baptist meeting-house to Capt. Palmer's; from William P. Wharton's to Howard Gilson's, and across by the Ames place to along the road this side of Major Palmer's.

Nos. 2 and 3. From Amos Farnsworth's place (Joy farmhouse), all the country between that and old road to Ayer, which extends south of Groton School.

No. 4. West Groton.

No. 5. North End.

No. 6. Mill district.

No. 7. Naumox road to Dunstable line.

No. 8. From No. 6 South; now Hobart.

No. 9. Chicopee.

No. 10. Prescott.

Nos. 11 and 12. Ayer; 11, Sandy Pond, Ayer.

November 30, 1805, the School Committee adopted instructions, seven in number, with a preamble. In the preamble I note in part that they state that proper instruction and government in the schools is important to the rising generation and the public, and having a due predilection for ancient sentiments and an abhorrence of the absurdities of infidelity and the spirit of innovation:

1. Requires every pupil to own a bible, a portion to be read every forenoon and afternoon.

2. The instructors to pray at opening of school and close of afternoon school, either extemporaneously or to read from their own composition or from prayer book; the scholars to rise and stand during service.

3. Teachers to inspect manners of pupils, giving lessons of virtue and wisdom, humanity and benevolence; correcting all their vices.

4. Next to morality, in point of importance, is the art of reading and writing the English language and the knowledge of figures. Writing books must be preserved for inspection.

5. Due subordination must be enforced. Lenient measure preferred to coercive and severe.

6. Uniformity of books contribute to the interest of learning. Books mentioned are Perry's spelling book and dictionary, Dana's Selections, American Preceptor, Beauties of the Bible, Adams' Correct Reader, Adams' Arithmetic (2nd or 3rd ed.), Pike's abridgement, Alexander's English grammar, a spelling book, dictionary, four reading books and an arithmetic and grammar.

7. Schoolmasters required to read the instructions to their pupils and return copies at close of school to Town Clerk in order to be entitled to their wages. Oliver Prescott, clerk, School Committee.

September 1, 1806. Names of children from four years to twenty-one, in No. 11 (Sandy Pond), twenty-one girls, nineteen boys, total forty-two. September 15, 1806, fifty-two children and one death.

March, 1807. Voted that the Mistress' board be put up to the lowest bidder. Mr. Elijah Pierce being the lowest bidder, it was struck off to him at one dollar a week.

In September, 1807, thirty-four girls, sixteen boys, fifty children at Sandy Pond.

In 1823, No. 10 was divided, making District No. 13.

In 1828, District No. 1, divided by James' Brook, making District No. 14.

These brief extracts will give you some idea of the condition of the schools one hundred years ago.

Up to the year 1869, the town had no public school buildings other than the type known as the little red schoolhouse. Forty-six years ago the schoolhouses were all of the same pattern as had existed for more than one hundred and fifty years. Just when or where the first brick schoolhouse was built, I think is not known, or at least, it has not been made public. In recent years some effort has been made to learn whether the town owns absolutely the land on which these houses were built or holds merely the use of land by right of eminent domain, but I do not think the date of buildings has been fixed.

About fifty years ago we waked to the fact that our schools were not keeping abreast of other communities. We had no High School. To those of us

who remember the fight to establish a High School it seems as if it lasted for years. It was not only discussed in town meeting, but every winter at least one meeting of the Lyceum, if my memory serves me, was devoted to the discussion, pro and con, of that measure, but if not in the Lyceum then at meetings called for the purpose. These meetings were most interesting. I remember one in which Rev. Daniel Butler and Mr. Warren Stone spoke. Mr. Stone made an eloquent plea for a High School and closed by saying that his reasons for wanting a High School were three boys.

Mr. Butler in his remarks answering the point of one speaker that we did not need a High School, contended that the average persons needed a High School to fit them for the duties of life; but there were a favored few who needed no such help; and concluded with this remark:

“Now, my friend, Mr. Stone, never needed a High School—why, if you had kept him on the ridge pole of a barn in his youth, he would have been a gentleman and a scholar.” High praise, and the three boys for whom the father pleaded have kept his standard bright.

About forty-five years ago we had an era of school building. In 1869 the Chaplin School was built of brick at a cost of six thousand dollars, the first school building in Groton, to depart from one room brick building.

In 1870 the High School was built at a cost of thirty thousand dollars, of which twenty-five hundred dollars was for the land.

In 1872 the recently vacated Tarbell School was built, a wooden structure of two rooms, one on first

floor and another above, at a cost of two thousand dollars.

In four years we built three schoolhouses at a cost of forty thousand, five hundred dollars.

The High School was established and opened in November 1859 but it was located in the Town Hall, occupying as one room, the present Selectmen's room, and this hall.

It had two small dressing rooms and a recitation and teacher's room. The large windows on the south side were placed later when the room was used for the library. There were windows to the west as the engine house was a later addition.

The grounds for play were on the south side of the building from the new south door to the street.

After the controversy was over in regard to establishing a High School and the school was actually started, it was so successful that it was soon apparent that we needed larger quarters. I think I speak within bounds when I say the fight was bitter; but in April 1870 it was voted to locate and build a building in District No. 1, so as to accommodate the High School as well as the primary school, (No. 1).

The schoolhouse in District No. 1 stood just north of the house of Caleb Butler, now owned by the Misses Warren. It covered all the ground owned by the town. A right of way between the house and school building enabled scholars to go to outbuildings. The water we used was taken from Mr. Butler's well and brought in pails to the school room.

When I was a pupil in the school, but one desk during a heavy rain storm was perfectly dry, all

others being more or less wet with water dripping from the leaky roof.

For years the district had wanted a High School. They were unwilling to have a new building for district use only; and the town was not likely to build unless pressed to do so by the district. The district also did not ask for repairs because they thought it best not to spend money on the old building.

Finally, as mentioned before, the town voted to build and the committee consisted of the chairman of the School Committee, the chairman of the Selectmen and three other citizens. No limit of expenditure was fixed by the town.

In 1871 the southern part of Groton was made a separate town by the name of Ayer. The new building was not yet ready for occupancy. In April 1871 the town voted "That No. 1 school be not removed to the High Schoolhouse and that no other school be kept there until the town authorize the same." In September, 1871, a sober second thought was shown by a vote to put No. 1 school into that room prepared for it in new High School building. No appropriation was made for the High School in 1871-2. In 1872-3 No. 1 school had two grades. In 1873 three grades were established; the higher grade was really a High School in everything but its name. In 1874-75 it was called a grammar school. The controversy went on for some years, much to the detriment of the school. One member of the committee stated that he hoped to see the day when the building was razed to the ground, brick by brick.

In the spring of 1883 there were about fifteen scholars. That year the number increased under a competent teacher and a friendly committee to fifty

scholars at the close of the year, and for the first time scholars were graduated from the school. Two diplomas were given, one for English course advanced, grammar school grade, and another for High School course of that time.

From that year, 1883, all hostility to the High School ceased. It appears from this account that for almost thirty years, counting the time that the project of establishing a High School was started until we had the High School on its present basis, a war was waged between the conservatives and the radicals, although at that time the establishment of a High School was not a radical measure, which was finally decided against the conservatives.

Is there today one person in town who would advocate the abolition of the High School?

In March, 1869, the town passed a vote abolishing school districts. In the early days the school district was the unit of power deciding most everything even to the selection of a teacher, although the town committee upon examination could withhold certificates. In No. 13 this was done and a law suit ensued, in which the School Committee won. The State had decided that the system was too antiquated to suit existing conditions and had passed a law leaving it to each town to continue or abolish the system. In April, 1869, a vote to re-establish school districts was passed by a show of hands. It was doubtful if this last vote was legal and a petition was sent to the Legislature to legalize the vote. This was not done and the vote to abolish district system was operative.

In March 1874 the town named the school-houses instead of designating them by numbers. Districts 11 and 12 had been set off to Ayer; 5 had disappeared. It was on the road leading to the house of Louis H. Clark.

- No. 1. Butler, High School.
- No. 2. Moors, near Groton School.
- No. 3. Dana, on Miss Sears' place, now discontinued.
- No. 4. Tarbell, West Groton.
- No. 6. Hobart, North End.
- No. 7. Chicopee, Chicopee road.
- No. 8. Trowbridge, Rocky Hill.
- No. 9. Willard, Lowell road, near Mr. H. H. Gay's house.
- No. 10. Prescott, Boston road.
- No. 13. Chaplin, Hollis street.
- No. 14. Winthrop, Mill.

In 1874 the town in making provision for a free public singing school chose a committee consisting of Charles H. Waters, Nathan R. Thayer and Henry W. Whiting, to finish and furnish a hall in Butler School building to be forever devoted to the purposes of music. This hall included the upper story of the Butler School. September 22 the hall was dedicated and formally transferred to the School Committee. Before the dedication Mr. Thayer, who was one of the most ardent advocates of the plan, had died.

The singing school commenced the week after the dedication under the direction of Mr. George Gardner. It consisted of two classes, each class receiving twenty lessons. The whole number attending the adult class was three hundred and ten, average attendance two hundred and seventy; whole number juvenile class two hundred and fifty, average attendance one hundred and fifty-five; five hundred and sixty persons in all receiving free musical

instruction. It was estimated that of the whole number attending both classes, two hundred and seventy-five persons received their first instruction in vocal music.

The report further says, "In a direct way, the improved character of the singing in our Sunday schools, the increased choirs in our several churches, the interpretations of the concert room, all attest to the immediate benefits of these schools." This school was continued for some years. It should be understood that this was done before the teaching of music was compulsory in the schools.

Dr. Samuel A. Green was the person to whom Groton was most indebted for the names of the school buildings.

The Butler school was named for Caleb Butler, the historian of the town, who was for many years the preceptor of the academy, and for his daughter Clarissa who taught in Lawrence Academy and Westford Academy, and had for many years private pupils (day scholars) in her home. She was also the first woman whom Groton honored by an election to the School Committee. She was a valuable member for many years.

The Willard, Trowbridge, Hobart, Chaplin and Dana schools were named for ministers of the town.

Willard was the minister before the town was burned. He then went to Boston where he baptized Benjamin Franklin and was vice president and acting president of Harvard College.

Trowbridge and Hobart came later. We have always had with us descendants of Trowbridge.

Of Hobart's family we have no descendants. A few years since a descendant called upon me,

He was interested in tracing the descendants, and the strength of heredity in the family was surprising. Very many of his descendants have become ministers and many of them of large city churches all over the country.

Dana was the minister at the opening of the Revolution. His descendants have made their mark in the world. He and his son were judges, a grandson was Mayor of Charlestown, and later descendants have done good service in the army and I think one was in the navy.

The name of Prescott is so well known in Groton that it needs no explanation. Most of the oldest Groton families have Prescott blood in their veins, and if we omit what the descendants not residents have done, the town is under obligations to many of that blood for the way in which they have performed the duties of citizenship.

Moors and Tarbell are names known recently in town and there are many descendants, not always of the name, who are residents of Groton. Maj. Moors, one of that name, was a captain at Bunker Hill; one of his descendants was a well known banker in Boston and another a minister in Greenfield, so well beloved that he was called the "Bishop of Western Massachusetts."

The Tarbell brothers, Col. ~~Abel~~ and Asa, for many years lived in West Groton. William Tarbell, a cousin, served for years at Washington's headquarters. A descendant of Asa Tarbell is one of the most distinguished portrait painters in the country.

Surely they were all citizens worthy of having their names given to our schoolhouses.

From this account it would seem that from 1680 when the settlers returned to the town, having been

driven away in 1676 by the town being attacked and burned by the Indians, there had been progress by such slow degrees that it did not attract the attention of the historian. In 1805 some slight changes were made in districting the town and deciding on school books and duties of teachers.

From 1869 to 1874 great improvements were made in the condition of the schools. In these five years the schoolhouses were named, a singing school, free not only to children, but to adults as well, was started, a High School established and three schoolhouses built. Surely a record worthy of any town.

For something over forty years there have been few changes in the school. The list of studies in the schools have been enlarged, more teachers employed in the High School and new departments created, so that now one can take a business course and an English and classical course.

The improvements have been chiefly that the same studies have been better taught and more time given by teachers in the different branches and better classification of scholars has been made.

No large things have been undertaken which make an impression upon persons outside of the school workers. In all these years no new school buildings have been erected. For some years there has been a vain effort to enlarge or build a new High school.

Last year we completed a schoolhouse of brick at West Groton, containing four rooms, teacher's room, play rooms, toilets, heat, electricity, water bubbles on first floor and basement; in a word, everything on the most scientific and up-to-date standard.

This building with grounds graded and everything completed cost twenty thousand dollars.

We are now erecting on Hollis street another school building of six rooms; an improvement in plan even over the one in West Groton and said to be on the most approved plan in the country.

An appropriation of twenty-three thousand dollars has been made for this building. It is also proposed, as a part of the plan, to enlarge the High School at an estimated cost of thirty thousand dollars. When the High School was built it was said to be the best High School building for the cost in the State and the plans were sent to the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia in 1876, as a part of the school exhibit of Massachusetts. No one who knows about schools thinks now that it is adapted to modern school methods.

More than forty years ago, in 1870, we built three schoolhouses at a total cost of forty thousand five hundred dollars. At that time our valuation was two million four hundred eight thousand four hundred eighty-three dollars; with the division of the town in 1871, it was reduced to one million five hundred eighty-three thousand eight hundred and thirty dollars. Today we propose to build three houses at an estimated cost of seventy-three thousand dollars, or with a valuation of four million four hundred twenty-two thousand three hundred eighty-five dollars. That is, we spent forty-five years ago five-ninths as much money as we now propose to spend with a valuation of one-half, or when we had to pay the larger part of indebtedness a valuation of one-third of what we now have. On this basis when we so need up-to-date housing of our children, we ought to feel that if our predecessors could do what they did we ought to do as much or more when our task is so much less burdensome financially.

In the last five years we have had a number of places sold to persons outside of Groton.

In the days when there were no High Schools, a large number of persons with children came to Groton to live, either temporarily or permanently, that their children might be educated in our schools, including the academy. Later the purchasers of homes here were largely older persons retired from business who thought that with diminished income it was better to live in the country.

Today the persons who elect to live in Groton are of an entirely different type. With the greater facilities of travel by railroads and electrics, with many more trains a day and with the automobile which makes Boston within an hour or an hour and a half, we are attracting active business men and progressive farmers and their families to live with us. This in time must make a great difference in our policies. Young people are more willing to keep abreast of the times and it seems to me that Groton is entering upon a period of greater prosperity than it has ever before enjoyed.

GEORGIANNA ADELIA BOUTWELL.



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